



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

23 CHARGED FOR ROLES IN KOREAN HUMAN SMUGGLING SCHEME THAT BROUGHT PROSTITUTES INTO THE UNITED STATES

Hundreds of Korean women were allegedly smuggled to work at brothels in L.A. and Bay Area

LOS ANGELES - Federal and state authorities have arrested 18 persons during a series of overnight enforcement actions that targeted a sophisticated human smuggling scheme believed to have brought hundreds of South Korean women into the United States to work as prostitutes.

A criminal complaint filed in Los Angeles yesterday and unsealed this morning charges a total of 23 defendants with conspiracy. Five of the defendants are fugitives being sought by federal authorities. The complaint alleges three objects to the conspiracy: harboring illegal aliens for an immoral purpose (prostitution); harboring and transporting illegal aliens; and violating the Travel Act, a federal statute that prohibits moving people across state lines for illegal sexual purposes, such as prostitution.

In addition to the criminal arrests, immigration officials took into custody 46 women who were working at brothels that were shut down last night. Agents are interviewing the women to learn more about the circumstances surrounding how they came here and how they were treated once they arrived.

The initial results of the investigation were announced at a news conference in Los Angeles by United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang; Marcy Forman, Director of the Office of Investigations for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Michael Kochmanski, Special Agent-in-Charge of IRS-Criminal Investigation Division; and Robert Osborne, Commander of the Detective Division of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

"This type of criminal organization exploits the hopes and dreams of immigrants," said United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang. "In this case, they exploited women, some of whom apparently suffered injuries as a result of their work. My office works very hard to eliminate these types of exploitation and to secure punishment for those who engage in them, seeking to profit at the expense of others."

The investigation focused on a criminal organization dubbed the Jung Organization that allegedly smuggled South Korean women into the United States and then provided the women to brothel operators. The brothels were concealed behind businesses that purported to be massage parlors and

"out-call service" operations. The prostitutes were allegedly managed by an underground network of Korean "taxi" services operated by members and associates of the Jung Organization. The "taxi" services coordinated the prostitutes' daily schedules and worked hand-in-hand with the brothel operators.

The affidavit alleges that organization ringleaders Young Joon Jung and Ho Kyung Kim oversaw efforts to recruit prospective prostitutes in South Korea and then arranged for them to be brought to the United States. Some of the women were smuggled into the country across the Mexican and Canadian borders. Others traveled to the United States on fraudulently obtained visitors' visas.

The women allegedly paid up to \$16,000 each to be smuggled into the country. Once they arrived, the women were expected to work as prostitutes, with a portion of their earnings going to repay their smuggling debts. As part of the scheme, some of the women were allegedly transported to Northern California, Colorado and Texas to work as prostitutes.

Marcy Forman, Director of the Office of Investigations for ICE, stated: "Last night, ICE special agents working in partnership with IRS investigators and local law enforcement dismantled one of the largest human smuggling and prostitution rings ever uncovered in Southern California. Not only are we targeting the people affiliated with these violent criminal networks, but we're going after the money that supports their criminal activities."

Michael Kochmanski, the Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles Field Office of IRS-Criminal Investigation Division stated: "The action yesterday shows the greater good that occurs when federal, state and local law enforcement agencies work together towards a common goal. Dismantling criminal organizations and halting the monetary gain from their illegal activities is a priority for IRS Criminal Investigation."

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The defendants arrested in the criminal are expected to make their initial appearances this afternoon in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

In conjunction with the arrests last night, federal agents executed search warrants at 28 locations across the greater Los Angeles area. The targeted sites included suspected brothels and so-called human smuggling "drop houses." Several local law enforcement agencies participated in last night's operation, including the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the Santa Monica Police Department, the Redondo Beach Police Department, and the Anaheim Police Department.

The brothels themselves were housed in a variety of businesses, including chiropractic offices, acupuncture clinics, spas and massage parlors. During last night's searches, investigators seized nearly \$300,000 in cash and more than \$650,000 in bank accounts. Investigators have located and expect to seize this afternoon another \$800,000 located in bank accounts.

In addition to the criminal arrests and prostitutes taken into custody, investigators took two men into custody on immigration violations. There were also four children, who are in the custody of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services.

The investigation was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, IRS-Criminal Investigation Division, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Authorities in San Francisco this morning announced a related case in which 29 people were indicted on charges of conspiracy to bring in and harbor aliens, money laundering conspiracy, conspiracy to transport female Korean nationals across state lines with intent to engage in prostitution, and conspiracy to use interstate communications by phone to engage in unlawful activity. Two defendants in San Francisco were charged with sex trafficking for knowingly using force, fraud or coercion to cause two women to engage in a commercial sex act. Two of the defendants named in the San Francisco case were taken into custody in Southern California.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.